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ABSTRACT

The salad bowl concept is discussed and the increasing importance of teaching English as a second language (ESL) is examined in this paper. When melting pot theory failed to preserve the values of cultural creativity and diversity of America's many immigrant groups, a new and better idea was born--the notion of the salad bowl. This concept implies that each individual from a different cultural background is encouraged to retain his or her own uniqueness while adding special flavors to enhance the whole. The salad is made richer by the number and variety of its ingredients. The ingredients in the vast salad bowl must have the "dressing." All U.S. citizens must be able to communicate in English as well as their mother tongues. English as a second language cannot simply be poured over the top of the salad. American English is a difficult language and requires time to learn. The dilemma is how to obtain the expertise needed to instruct the many new people who continue to come here and to find the funds needed to support this vital work. Educators have made much progress in two areas: (1) teaching Americans to recognize the value of international understanding based on language fluency, and (2) methods and techniques for teaching ESL. The most effective ESL teachers are the people who have themselves learned a second language. Regarding teaching methods for ESL, eclectic approaches drawn from methods such as the grammar-translation method, the audio-lingual method, and the functional-notional method seem to be the best procedures presently known. ESL teaching has become so critical that many colleges and universities have begun special programs to prepare ESL educators. (RM)

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ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE AND THE SALAD BOWL CONCEPT

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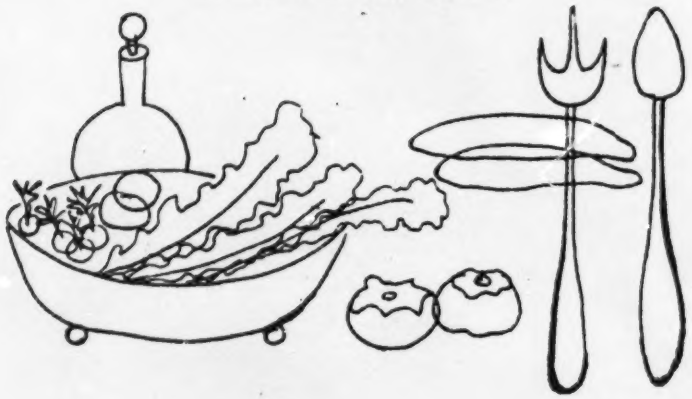

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FOREWORD

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ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE AND THE SALAD BOWL CONCEPT

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A near crisis situation has developed in the public schools and other educational institutions of the United States. The great influx of non-English speaking people has sent the education system into a furor of controversy about how to teach English to children and adults from a variety of cultural and linguistic backgrounds. We have advanced enough in language-learning research to know that these people must not be left to learn catch-as-catch-can, as often happened in the past. They must be taught English quickly and well, in order to cope with our ultra-modern American life. They must add something to the American salad bowl and not be simply assimilated into an anachronistic melting pot, as our society has been called in the past.

To understand the salad bowl concept, one needs to examine its predecessor, the melting pot theory. It is well known that the first European immigrants to settle the east coast of this country were English. Not too many years later, however, peoples from other European countries began arriving on these shores. The beginning of discrimination in America dates from these colonial times. As the dominant group, the English were in control of all the early institutions and they prohibited other ethnic groups from entry into their privileged social system except on their own terms. What ironic behavior this was for people who had themselves often come here in search of freedom!

Yet it was not long before Americans of English ancestry were outnumbered. In less than one hundred years after the signing of the Declaration of Independence, more than five hundred thousand French Canadians had settled in New England. The Irish came in large numbers in the middle of the nineteenth century.

Many Germans had already come to the United States. They were followed by Greeks, Italians, Poles and Swedes; and many other immigrant groups. They came by the millions, seeking economic advancement, the American dream, and a refuge from persecution. Immigration quotas were established after the great depression hit in the 1930's. Each group brought with it a different language and a unique culture. Walking along the streets of New York City at the beginning of this century it was common to hear ten tongues being spoken in as many minutes. Many towns and cities in Connecticut such as Hartford, New Britain, New Haven and Waterbury were poly-lingual at this time.

The dominant language, nevertheless, remained English. Their linguistic isolation from the power elite posed a problem for immigrants seeking jobs. They learned what English they could, as fast as they could, in order to obtain whatever work was available. Such haphazard learning of English as a second language was slow and native accents remained strong. There were homes to be established in the new land and families that had to be fed, so thorough learning of English had to be set aside. The result was maximum work at unskilled manual labor and other difficult or undesireable jobs. The adult immigrants often had minimal opportunities to become literate in English. At the end of the first difficult decade in America, many immigrants had still attained only a bare survival level of fluency in English. Their mother tongues remained their chief languages of home, neighborhood and church.

The immigrants, however, were willing to sacrifice anything in order to earn their livings and stay in the United States. Their children frequently rejected the old country ways, and put behind them their parents' native culture and language. The children forgot the mother tongue and even were ashamed to own their "foreign" background. They gladly conformed to whatever was required

to enter the social institutions controlled by the English tradition. They did not want to be considered different or hyphenated Americans. Bilingualism and multiculturalism would not have been acceptable concepts in the early part of the twentieth century, so they willingly flowed into one giant melting pot. They were supposed to come out "Americans." We do not know who first conceived of this idea, but Israel Zangwill, an English-Jewish (Yiddish) author, popularized the theory. Out of the rendering down of mixed languages and different cultures was supposed to emerge the stew of a superior culture - American.

Over the period of one or two generations most of the European immigrants did blend. Gradually abandoning their linguistic and cultural heritage, and risking self-alienation, they thought that they had done what was right. Any efforts to hold onto the old ways were scorned. Much ridicule was suffered by the first generation in the New World and by their children. Too late for most of them, the melting pot approach was recognized as a failure. No vibrant synthesis of diverse cultures had actually been produced. Only the dominant and powerful Anglo-culture remained. Most people had been acculturated and assimilated by it. That was what the new country seemed to demand. The values of cultural creativity and diversity were lost. What could be done when chemical elements are mixed to create new compounds was not possible when it was thinking, sensitive human beings who were being blended.

Thus, through the failure of the melting pot theory to preserve the values of cultural creativity and diversity was born a new and better idea - the notion of the salad bowl.[1] In this concept each individual from a different cultural background is encouraged to retain their own uniqueness while adding special flavors to enhance the whole. The "salad" is made richer by the number and

variety of its ingredients. Rather than just being acculturated and then assimilated, like many who preceded them, today we believe that people who seek to build a new life in the United States should become part of a multi-cultural society. Instead of purveying a type of re-socialization that is often self-alienating, we try to teach these individuals who are joining our great American salad bowl that they can continue to cherish their first language and culture. Learning English and acquiring the skills necessary to cope with American society does not mean abandoning one's heritage. By valuing the cultures that immigrants bring with them, while assisting them to function in this society, we help them to develop a sense of self-worth. There must consequently be far fewer physical and psychological drop-outs among the immigrants to the United States in the 1980's.

But what mysterious dressing on this complex salad can unite so many different kinds of people? What can join us all and yet permit us to retain our ethnicity? It is the vigorous and dynamic American English language! This is an Indo-European tongue in which a largely Romance vocabulary derived from Greek and Latin roots functions in a predominantly Germanic syntax. American English contains borrowed words and coined phrases from all the languages of the world. Once newcomers can use it to communicate with the people of their adopted land, they are well on the way to becoming part of this pluralistic society. Work presents less of a problem and life becomes more than mere survival.

The ingredients in the vast salad bowl that we call the United States must have the "dressing." All of our citizens must be able to communicate in English, as well as their mother tongues. Therein lies our role as educators. For English as a second language, commonly referred to as ESL, cannot simply be

poured over the top of the salad. American English is a difficult language and requires time to learn. Acquiring fluency in English also takes expert teaching and long, patient practice, as we who still make mistakes well know. The dilemma is how to obtain the expertise needed to instruct the many new people who continue to come here, and to find the funds needed to support this vital work. There is also the problem of those people who have been in this country for several years, but due to various problems, have not been able to receive adequate English instruction. Due to their lack of language proficiency, many of these individuals are forced to eke out miserable existences at the bottom of the economic ladder in these inflationary times.

At this point one is frequently reminded of those millions of immigrants who were mentioned earlier. They came to the United States knowing no English. Often they had had little formal education of any kind in their homelands. They had to pick up what they could along the way, work, and support their families. We certainly could not claim that they were failures. They were, in general, our grandparents, or in some cases our parents. We must recall, however, that only a small minority of the members of this generation had the opportunity to complete even one year of high school. How many of these immigrants could afford the time to go to night school? Were many of them able to receive modern vocational training? We know that most of their waking hours were spent laboring in one of the lower-paid jobs. Sometimes they were holding down two jobs at once to make ends meet. There was just no time or strength left at the end of days like these to master English.

The parents' lack of opportunity to learn good English directly affected their children. In order to help to support the family, the older children may have been forced to go to work before finishing high school. They lacked

intellectual role models in their immediate families. Many of their contemporaries in their peer groups also could not aspire to much formal schooling. Worse, there were parents who felt that if working in the local mill or factory was good enough for them, it was sufficient for their children. Not having had it themselves, they sometimes did not recognize the value of a college education. They believed that they had succeeded in life because they had brought up a family and achieved at least part of the American dream.

There were, nevertheless, those who made every sacrifice and pushed their children to get all of the advanced education possible. The greatest parental failure in the first half of this century was in letting offspring forget the mother tongue. Most of these immigrant parents communicated the "English only" attitude that had been instilled or even frightened into them. They did not regard being able to speak two languages as an advantage. They never questioned the cultural imperialism of the dominant Anglo elite. How frustrating it was for the children of these immigrants to be torn between two tongues! Since they often had to interpret for their parents, they recognized the value of knowing fluent English. They couldn't understand why you were supposed not to be a loyal American if you also spoke your mother tongue. Having to make a choice exclusively favoring one or the other language confused them. The value of their bilingualism was lost. Their children are monolinguals today.

We know better now. Educators have made much progress in two areas: (1) teaching Americans to recognize the value of international understanding based on language fluency, and (2) methods and techniques for teaching English as a second language. We found out that there are "critical languages" where sufficient Americans who know them are lacking. Sadly these are often the very

tongues spoken by our immigrant forebears that would be known by many of our citizens today if proficiency in other languages had not been so long disapproved. Now we are instituting "crash" programs in "the national interest" in order to prepare a new generation of young people who will know these vital tools of cross-cultural communication. Indeed, we very quickly learned in training ESL teachers that those who are most effective are the people who have themselves learned a second language. They are much more likely to comprehend the struggles involved in acquiring a new tongue. They can empathize with the frustrations of beginning language learning. These people know that ESL students come with very different experiences than those that are usually anticipated by the programs of our traditional schools.

Good ESL learning situations in the 1980's are transactional rather than single-mindedly English oriented. As stated by Muriel Saville-Troike:

> the teacher who understands the factual and conceptual foundations of the second language in a cross-cultural setting will be much better prepared to apply the methodology in appropriate ways to meet the needs of the individual student, than will be a teacher who has been given only a mechanical set of procedures to follow. If we realize the goal of providing equal educational opportunity to children who come from other language backgrounds, we must first learn to accept their existing linguistic and cultural patterns as strengths to build upon, rather than as handicaps to successful learning.[2]

As to the techniques for teaching English as a second language, I wish that I could announce that the magic method has been found. We have come a long way and are doing a far better job than previously. Many excellent materials have been produced. Still there are problems and conflicts as to what is the best approach. Fortunately, research is extensive and large numbers of educators are sharing their findings. We have an international organization

called Teachers of English to Speakers of other Languages (TESOL) with affiliates in most states. ESL research is often being published in TESOL journals. In her text on ESL methodologies and techniques, however, Betty Wallace Robinett says:

> The search for the best method is reminiscent of the search for the Holy Grail; indeed, at times it has appeared that proponents of certain pedagogical methods have been just as fanatic.[3]

We never give up, however. As preparers of professional educators the best that we can do now is to teach what we have experienced as being most successful and to encourage being creative. The older grammar-translation method is now generally discouraged, as is the straight audio-lingual method. But each of these approaches does still have something to offer and there are times when they can be effective. Due to its practicality the functional-notional method is now popular. We have been able to increase the emphasis on the student's learning style and encourage a more balanced approach. All four language skills: understanding, speaking, reading and writing are taught, optimistically, in that order. Given various student abilities, ages, and interests as well as the different personalities of instructors, plus the desire to adapt to meet the needs of students; eclectic approaches seem to be the best procedures that we presently know.

In any case, our ESL work must go on and even expand. The influx of new immigrants from countries like Cambodia, Laos and Viet Nam points up our lack of knowledge and materials for teaching English to newcomers from South East Asia. We were not particularly well prepared for refugees from Cuba and Haiti. These new additions to our American salad bowl offer the greatest challenges to ESL teachers. We have already experienced some success and we feel excited

about what these people, in turn, are teaching us about the parts of the world from which they come. Their art, culture, literature and music are fascinating and enlightening. Their special character traits are heart-warming. They bring the East and the Caribbean closer to us and our more established American students.

ESL teaching has become so critical that several institutions of higher learning in our state have special programs to prepare ESL educators. Special courses for foreign-born undergraduates are taught at other local colleges and universities. Some kind of ESL instruction is offered at many public schools, as well as some church-related and independent institutions. Bilingual education is provided somewhere in Connecticut for speakers of six different mother tongues: Greek, Haitian French, Italian, Polish, Portuguese, and Spanish. These programs were mandated by a Connecticut State law enacted in 1977. Spanish is by far the most common mother tongue but, lest we forget, let us recall that bilingual education always means teaching in <u>two</u> languages. One of these, in our case, is always English.

For children who speak a mother tongue that is not numerous enough to qualify for bilingual education, or where no qualified teacher can be found who speaks the mother language, there are different program models designed to teach English as well as possible. The goal is to prepare students to be able to handle the normal content material and soon join their comrades in the regular classrooms. The teachers who work with these ESL students have an especially difficult mission, but the rewards are also great. They observe students who once knew no English learning to communicate with their peers in all situations, including the scholastic domain.

English as a second language is one of the most exciting and dynamic areas in teaching today. Feedback is quick, for the teacher who learns to handle all kinds of unexpected situations as they arise. It might seem overwhelming to think of teaching twenty students from ten different countries, but is can be done successfully. The challenges are endless. Best of all, the teacher usually ends up learning as much as the students, for they are very sharing.

We have a particularly great responsibility in the field of adult ESL education. The basic philosophy is the same - to provide the cultural orientation that is needed in order to adapt to living in the United States and to combine this with acquiring basic skills such as applying for employment, meeting the expectancies of the American work ethic, managing homes under the new circumstances, and dealing with emergencies. We need to prepare instructors who can teach mature newcomers, recognizing their different aspirations, attention spans, and self-images. The inability to work creatively with adults from other cultures results in confusion and frustration for them and for the Americans who are involved.

This is not a temporary problem. We will continue to see new elements joining our American salad bowl. Last year, for instance, international college and university students accounted for 300,000 of the non-Americans arriving in this country. We are all aware of the refugees coming from Cambodia, Cuba, Haiti, Laos, Lebanon and Viet Nam. Other immigrants are coming from Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East - not to mention the many east and west Europeans. Many Puerto Ricans are coming to the mainland who, though American citizens, often speak only Spanish when they arrive here. They all need help.

Our past experiences and new knowledge of instructional methodologies have made us more aware of the satisfactions and usefulness of bilingualism. In tandem with ESL maintaining the mother tongue can add to the personal and intellectual growth of Americans and those-to-become Americans. Some of our citizens have maintained their historic commitment to the melting pot mentality, disregarding the fact that the contributions of most ethnic groups were never included in its amalgamation. What usually happened was simply that immigrants were assimilated into the dominant Anglo-culture. Those who did experience a true melting pot process and those who were absorbed, as well as the few who somehow escaped both processes, are part of America today. We cannot help feeling regret if the languages of our forebears have been lost. Hopefully, the present generations will go down in history as people who succeeded in preserving the precious cultures and valuable tongues that are now being added to our American salad bowl. May we also be remembered for having developed optimum methods of teaching English as a second language so that all Americans have equal civic, economic and social opportunities.

NOTES

1 This term was used by Bambi Cardenes at a meeting of the United States Commission on Civil Rights held at San Antonio, Texas in March, 1974.

2 Muriel Saville-Troike, Foundations for Teaching English as a Second Language. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1976, p. 5.

3 Betty Wallace Robinett, Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, and New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1978, p. 159.